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THE MUSICAL TIMES,

And Singing Class Circular.

JANUARY 1, 1868.

THE MUSIC OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH.

By G. A. MACFARREN.

(Continued from p. 217.)

THESE remarks have extended to such length, that I must defer, till some possible future opportunity, any further exposition of my views as to the musical setting of the invariable texts which constitute the Morning, Communion, and Evening Services. These views, should they ever find utterance, would refer to the declamation of the words, and the expression or even heightening of their meaning; to the embodiment of such declamation and expression in a musical design; to the treatment of which the pieces are susceptible when they are to be sung by an organized choir, on ordinary and on ferial occasions; and to their possible treatment when they are to be sung by a congregation. I the less regret the limitation of space in the journal, and of patience in its readers, which must for the present curb me from greater enlargement upon this subject, because my views are already in some sort set forth in printed compositions of my own; and because their verbal statement might be regarded as an apology for—in the Elizabethan sense—or an annotation upon these compositions, which is as little called for as it might be little welcome. I will then only iterate, with the purpose of making it, if may be, impressive, my conviction, that the several pieces comprised in the Service should be set to music on a larger scale, as regards length and development, than anthems or any other occasional pieces; that this is as much demanded by the importance of the texts, as it is admitted by the very wide range of character and sentiment they present for the exercise of the musician's imagination, and for the employment of his technical resources; and that it behoves whomever may have the choice of works for performance—since composers have need to write to meet their requirements—to consider the matter in this aspect when they make their selections, and never to discard a setting of the *Te Deum* or the other canticles, on the ground of its too great elaboration or too grand proportions, provided its material be of quality worthy of the subject.

It is now to speak of the Hymn Tune, the section of our ecclesiastical music that is the most peculiarly characteristic of the Reformed Church.

It is well accredited how every sect of religious Reformers, since the permanent establishment of Christianity, has been famous for the hymn singing of its members who seem ever to have found, in this form of expression, a natural, easy, hearty, and genial vent for their devout emotions. So with the Waldenses and Albigenses, whose purposed suppression was the origin of the terrible Holy Inquisition; so with the Lollards in Northern Germany (whose name is derived from the class of songs, we are told, which they employed in their devotions,) and with the followers of Wykliffe, their reputed representatives in this country; so with the Hussites in Bohemia; so, most conspicuously, with the Lutherans; so with the Calvinists, as much in Scotland as in Geneva, and with the Huguenots who held the same principles in France; so with the partisans of

our own Reformation, and with the Independents who sprang from, however violently they opposed them; and so, not to swell the list with the denominations of countless branches from the same stock and its congener, with the Baptists and Methodists. There needs no profound knowledge of music, nor deep insight into humanity, to lead to an understanding of the fact that strong feelings, however stimulated through passive observation, demand active expression; and that the rhythmical nature of hymnody, marked in its character and facile of comprehension, renders this a specially fitted medium for such expression. The ear promptly notes the strong accent and definite phrasing of a metrical tune, which the memory easily retains; and this becomes a ready vehicle for the out-pouring of the heart whose feelings are overflowing. There is a season, when, impatient of the most powerful oratory, and of the still stronger eloquence of music, a fervent multitude can no longer listen, but must give utterance, each and all, to the feeling that has been stirred within them; and then it is that their common voice gives speech to their common emotion in the choral song, whose well-remembered strains are as a tramway to the verses, which they almost as much prompt as carry. Any more complicated, any less clearly defined composition, would fail wholly of the purpose these simple broad melodies fulfil; and any ornamentation of their simplicity, or refinement of their breadth of character, would take from these melodies that power of fulfilment which in all times and climes they have been proved to possess. It will not be supposed that this is said in respect to any particular tunes, but to the special style of tune which everybody associates with the title, and will at once distinguish in connection with what further may here be said of hymn tunes.

Some persons affirm that the majority of the primitive Reformation tunes, whether of Saxony, Geneva, Scotland, or England, are of secular origin. This it might be as dangerous to dispute, as difficult to prove.

There can be no question, on the other hand, that very many of them are of ancient ecclesiastical derivation; they having been traced to Gregorian sources, and identified with melodic fragments whence their notes have been selected—literally selected—and reduced to rhythm. The process of making new melodies out of old phrases was hinted at in reference to the reputed Chant of Tallis, upon which I have had elsewhere occasion to enlarge, and which needs not now to be further discussed.

This is certain; that, after the importation by Miles Coverdale, in 1538, of some continental tunes, to which he adapted English verses, without any recorded success, the first attempt to popularise hymn-singing in this country was that made by Sternhold in his versification of the Psalms, which he adapted to the favourite ballad tunes of the time, designing to supplant the profane words—so he esteemed them—wherewith these were associated. Sternhold's policy was akin to that of the Rev. Rowland Hill, of the Tabernacle, in the Blackfriars'-road, who professed that "it were shame for the Devil to have all the pretty tunes to himself," and set his congregation singing, accordingly, hymns to the popular street tunes of the day. Whether or not this famous preacher was the first in modern times to enunciate the principle, it has been acted upon, from his time to the present, with wanton extravagance, reckless

of all effect and of all consequence, save that of giving a passive pleasure to the vulgar crowd, and of gaining a momentary popularity for the local practiser of the system.

The tune of "Miss Ann Catley's Hornpipe," so called because that favorite of the public was wont to dance to it, was originally sung by the same versatile performer in Kane O'Hara's dramatic piece *The Golden Pippin*, as a song named "The Guardian Angel;" this name gave it sufficient odour of sanctity for Madan, the popular preacher of the Lock Chapel, to include it in his collection of hymn tunes, where it first figured under the less pious and far less significant title of "Helmsley." Again, the tune called "Rousseau's Dream," which is a dance in a comic opera, that the great revolutionary philosopher claimed, if he did not compose; that of "Pilgrims of the Night," which is an unmitigated French dance tune; these tunes, and many others of the same stamp and of like extraction, though they are of the worst possible class of tunes which bad taste could choose, induce not the worst effect of this system of profane adaptation to sacred use. Like "Abridge," and "Darwell," and "Truro," and very far too many others of the original hymnical fabrications of cobblers, tinkers, Dissenting ministers, and, alas, even beneficed clergymen of the last century, these adapted tunes are not generally known in connection with any other time, or place, or sentiment, than the hour, the house, and the feeling of worship; and thus, however coarse the appetite they gratify, they lead not the thoughts of the singer or the hearer out of the church, into secular situation and secular circumstances. The direct contrary is the case with the numerous misappropriations from vocal and instrumental works that are universally familiar, and that have therefore the effect from which those others are free, the effect of reproducing in the sanctuary all the thoughts with which they are elsewhere associated; and this is the worst effect of Sternhold's system in the sixteenth century, and Hill's revival in the nineteenth. So, when one hears in church the Prayer from *Masaniello*, one sees, in the mind's eye, the scene of the Spanish viceroy's nuptial, with the dumb fisher-girl of Naples witnessing the rites, and discovering in the perjured bridegroom her betrayer; so, when one hears the Andante from the grand scene of Agatha, in *Der Freischütz*, one pictures the anxiety of the ranger's daughter for the success of her lover in the trial shot, whereon her life's happiness depends; so, again, when the passage from *Elijah*, wherein the prophet prays for the rain, is misapplied to another sense and transplanted into the Church service, the hearer cannot but imagine the situation in the oratorio, with the boy watching the growth of the coming cloud, which swells from the size of a man's hand until it bursts in a refreshing flood upon the parched land; and so, yet further, no one can divest the theme of the variations from Beethoven's Sonata in A Flat of the social surroundings with which it is familiar to him—the fireside, the friends around it, the gentle eyes that reflect the tender sentiment of the music, or even the boarding-school lesson at which the difficulties of the piece as much perplexed the pupil as irritated the teacher—when one hears this lovely melody distorted into a hymn tune. If music be anything other than a meaningless emission of sounds, if music be anything more than a regulated succession of noises, then is the power of

suggestion one of its highest and one of its most irresistible qualities. This power of suggestion works more or less forcibly upon more or less sensitive, more or less poetical minds; but, while perhaps only the richest imagination is susceptible of a full impression from a great work of art, the meanest perception is always awake to memory's promptings, and experiences most keenly from a strain of music the suggestion of the circumstances under which it has before been heard. Here have been quoted at random some pieces in common Church use, and noted some of their inevitable suggestions to all and every of those who have heard them in the situations for which they were designed. Instances, quite as glaring as the above, or more so, might unhappily be multiplied; and might in some sort be defended, were the names of the good musicians who have prostituted their ability upon such perversions any defence for the mischief they have aided. The excess of an evil takes not from its deformity, and even the countenance of respected practitioners gives not respectability to an abominable practice. If there ever was truth as to art and its influences, this certainly is one; the principle of Thomas Sternhold and of Rowland Hill is, without exception and without qualification, wrong; they may put sacred words into one's mouth, but they cannot shut the secular thoughts, appropriate to the music to which those words are misfitted, from his heart; and, in fact, in a far worse sense than the divine intended when he spoke of the diabolical proprietorship of extra-ecclesiastical melodies, the Devil will have such pretty tunes to himself, though he go into Church to fetch them, and receive them with the benefit of clergy.

There is, however, a purpose, most important and most sacred, for which this valuable suggestive power of music is available; but which has been, most strangely and most wantonly, disregarded in provisions for the hymnody of the English Church. This purpose is to remind us whenever an exclusively Church melody is heard, of the subject, the sentiment, and the particular words with which we are accustomed to hear it; and thus to make the tune veritably speak the verses to our inner sense as distinctly as orator could pronounce them. For example: whoever hears the tune of "God save the King," whether with words or without, whether during the rule of a male sovereign or a female, recognises in it the accents of loyalty, and knows it to be a prayer for the head of the State whereof he is a subject. Be this at a solemn festival, be it on an occasion of mere amusement, in the midst of a vast assembly at the celebration of a national holiday, in utter solitude far remote from our native land, either played simply and separately, or interwoven in the elaborations of a complicated composition, it necessarily and invariably recalls to the obtusest of Englishmen, the thought of his home and of the power that protects it. In like manner, the tune of the 100th Psalm is, by long and inseparable connection, so integrated with the text, that to hear it is almost the same as to hear a recital of the words. The same is the case with Henry Carey's tune for the Easter Hymn (commonly ascribed to a Dr. Worgan); with the tune of "Helmsley" in association with the Advent Hymn; with a poor but pretty air in connection with the verses of questionable beauty beginning "Jerusalem the Golden;" and with an execrable spoliation of the lively, piquant, and sar-

castic melody of "Se vuol ballare, Conte Almaviva," in its almost blasphemous misapplication to Keble's exquisite poem, "Sun of my soul." Besides these, I can learn of no other tunes whatever that are in any respect identified with particular poems in general Church use. In one of these instances, I am certain that the verses owe their acceptance entirely to the popularity of the tune commonly sung to them; but there are persons so insensitive to the great advantage of the suggestiveness of music, so dull to perceive its beneficial power, that even in this case, and in the three others just cited, they seek to supplant with other compositions the familiar tunes, and so to distract, confuse, and perplex whomever may sing, and whomever may hear their resetting, and to destroy the good effect which the undivided association of the same music with the same words cannot but induce.

Widely different is the practice in Lutheran Germany, where, for the most part, certain hymns are as invariably sung to certain tunes as our National Anthem and our 100th Psalm. An unfailing consequence of this is, that any one of these tunes serves as aptly for a motto in a musical work, as would a quotation of the text to which it belongs in a literary composition, and as clearly brings the sense before the mind of an audience. We in this country, consequently, lose a chief part of the charm, if not of the beauty, of Mendelssohn's *St. Paul*, and some other of his sacred works, from our not knowing in connection with their subjects the Choral tunes wherewith these are interspersed; and the English composer is deficient of a means of illustration that Bach and all the musicians of North Germany have employed with infinite advantage. To prove this loss, let it be supposed that an audience, familiar with the hymn, "Sleepers wake, a voice is calling," in association with its tune, heard this choral melody after the representation of the miracle that wrought St. Paul's conversion; and everybody will understand how different an impression the tune in that situation must make upon the intelligence of such an audience, from what would be possible were even as good a tune capriciously chosen for the words, that might be named Chester, or London New, or St. James's.

I pretend not that the claims of musicians, here briefly indicated, are likely to weigh in the balance of church proprieties. When recent proposals have been acted upon for the "musical education of the clergy," and the present few of our competent musicianly priesthood have become the many, the resources of an artist may have other consideration than they now hold. There is yet another, and an indisputable advantage resultant from the unbroken union of words and music, which was exemplified on the field of Sadowa after the great fight that established the potency of Prussia. The tumult of the battle was stilled, the clangour of arms was hushed, twilight's gentle veil was drawn over the scene of slaughter, when there arose the sublime sounds of a nation's thanks, poured forth from the voices of a mighty, conquering people. The hymn of gratitude, "Nun danket alle Gott" was commenced, in the fullness of his heart, by one of the soldiery; with electric swiftness, the spirit that prompted this ebullition communicated itself from man to man, from rank to rank, until the entire mass of that almost countless army was moved by the same impulse, and tens upon tens of thousands joined in the

solemn song, their voices as much as their hearts in unison. The musical, the moral, the religious effect of this wondrous performance must have been awful in its beauty; it may be imagined, but silence is its only description. Had the host been of English men, the poem the best and fittest in our hymnology, the spirit the same which moved all men to utter it, could the like power to give and take each other's enthusiasm have impelled men who knew not whether to sing the words to any tune more or less suitable or unsuitable to their metre, which tune was only distinguished, but scarcely characterised, by the name of a city, or a saint, or a conventicle?

(To be continued.)

If the prevailing "collecting" mania were to attack the editor of a musical periodical, we can assert from experience, that he might have an amusing, if not an instructive, mass of specimens worthy of preservation in a very short time. Not only are letters bearing upon the art to which the journal is devoted sent to the paper, any one of which, if printed, would fill at least half the number, but communications upon subjects having nothing whatever to do with music are continually forwarded, and so carefully directed as to prevent the slightest notion of their having been sent to the wrong office. Many of these are, of course, abstractedly, of the highest interest: personally, for instance, we have the utmost sympathy with the late benevolent mission of Sir Moses Montefiore; we are glad to be enlightened as to new books in the press, and would do all in our power to assist the "Ship-wrecked Mariners' Society;" but, in our capacity as editor of a strictly musical paper, we fail to see how these matters can be alluded to in our columns. Then again, how difficult is the task of selecting and condensing those letters which by their nature are really entitled to consideration. One correspondent, perhaps, will send an account of a concert, clipped from a newspaper, which begins by announcing that "an interesting musical performance took place at the Town Hall last Thursday," but without furnishing us with the slightest clue as to what town the Hall belongs to, or what particular Thursday is intended. Another will come with the "compliments" of a vocalist, drawing our attention exclusively to the portion of the critique where he or she is praised. Then fulsome laudations of artists, written by themselves or their friends, are boldly sent in manuscript, with an intimation that they have been constant subscribers for many years; and even comic singers appear scarcely able to see that the *Musical Times* has a circulation amongst a class hardly sympathetic enough with their efforts before the public to be of any benefit to them. But perhaps the greatest difficulty that we experience is in remorselessly cutting out the "fine writing" of our correspondents. We know, that in doing this, we are lacerating their feelings to a cruel extent; but our duty must be done; and, like the surgeon who performs, from necessity, an equally painful operation, we always hope that, if the patient recover, he will be all the better for it afterwards. This "fine writing" is rather an epidemic of the day; and, if not checked in time, will be likely to spread with alarming rapidity. In America, it is perhaps even more prevalent than in England. A Chicago writer, for instance, who was much affected by the play, *Arrah na Pogue*, says, "There are passages in it which